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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MONROVIA 000532

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: REACTION TO THE TRC REPORT -- A CALMER TONE

REF: A) MONROVIA 487 B) MONROVIA 465 C) MONROVIA 125

Classified By: DCM Brooks Robinson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Two weeks after the TRC report was released public opinion still does not appear to be fully informed of the content of the report. Debate centers around the most publicized aspects of the report, the banning of President Sirleaf from future public office and discussion of who was or as not recommended for prosecution. In response, the TRC plans to offer a summarized version of the report for public dissemination. The House continues to delay any public action until the release of the edited version. The International Contact Group on Liberia (ICGL) released a statement on July 13 supporting the process and discouraging those making inflammatory statements. President Sirleaf still has not responded publicly to the report, but privately has indicated the report has given her more cause to run for re-election. End Summary.

PUBLIC REACTION

¶2. (SBU) Roundtable discussions with civil society organizations and the media held at the Embassy showed that the public in general does not have access to the TRC report and does not fully understand the breadth of the recommendations. None of the participants had finished reading the entire report and others had trouble getting it because it was only available on the internet. (Note: the TRC posted the unedited report on their website but has not distributed any hard copies.) In both of the roundtables elements of society called on the USG to make a statement about the report to "guide the process. In both cases the Ambassador responded that "it is up to Liberians to decide how they want the process to go forward."

¶3. (SBU) The public has remained fixated on the recommendation of banning from public office financiers and those who gave political support to the different factions. The President was the most prominently named person in this group. Initial reporting in the press stated that the president would be required to resign immediately. Later the press reporting changed to show that she would not be allowed to run for a second term as was actually in the report. Another prominent discussion is about who was named in the report for prosecution or other sanctions and which names were missing. These involved both people considered perpetrators and supporters. Two days after the release of the report a list of names started circulating at the University of Liberia listing prominent public figures and how they had supported factions during the conflict.

¶4. (U) TRC chairman Jerome Verdier has gone on radio for the first time to talk about the TRC report. Verdier said in a meeting with Poloff on July 16 that he is hoping this action will clarify some of the confusion in the public. He also said that the TRC would develop a "50 page simplified summary" that would allow the public to better access and understand the TRC report and its recommendations. (Note: The media roundtable group had agreed that a majority of the people would not read the report in its current version because it is too long and not in a local language.)

LEGISLATURE DEBATING NEXT STEPS

15. (U) The Legislature, as a body, has not made any public statements about the report since sending it to a committee for study. Individual representatives and senators have attacked the report; however, these have mainly with those named in the report itself under the "most notorious violator" section. Other legislators have expressed the desire to move forward with the process. The legislature seems content to wait until it is given the final edited report in late August.

ICGL WEIGHS IN

16. (U) The ICGL met July 10 to discuss the TRC report. Most members reported significant interest from their capitals. The ICGL issued a joint statement on July 13 commending the work of the TRC in completing the report; condemning those who have made inflammatory statements that would threaten the peace and those that made threats against the commissioners; and urging Liberians to work together to implement the recommendations of the report. The ICGL statement received extensive media coverage.

SIRLEAF REMAINS SILENT

17. (C) President Sirleaf told Ambassador on July 13 that she believes that the reaction about her being named in the report has a political dimension. Despite urgings from the ambassador and others, the President has not made any direct public statements about the report, allowing her spokesman and minister of information to react for the presidency. Her staff is reviewing the report and the constitutional implications of the recommendations. She now believes that her

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government's policy of non-interference towards the TRC was a mistake; they should have been more involved. She is encouraging members of the legislature to have Town Hall meetings around the country to discuss the recommendations with their constituents. Sirleaf hinted that the TRC report has given her "no option but to run for re-election in 2011" because not to run would appear to run from a fight -- which she has never done before.

18. (SBU) In the past week political partner Varney Sherman (a 2005 presidential candidate whose party recently merged with Sirleaf's Unity Party) publically called on her to run again despite the TRC recommendations. Similar calls have come from a delegation of traditional chiefs, and a rent-a-crowd of market women.

19. (C) Comment: It appears that calls by the Ambassador and others on the ex-warlords to tone down their rhetoric are having a positive effect. Emboldened, several Liberian groups repeated the call, and the public discussion of a return to violence has ceased. We understand, however, that threats to TRC Commissioners and staff continue. Sirleaf's remarks to the Ambassador are the clearest indication yet that she has made up her mind to run again, suggesting that not doing so would be capitulating to her political enemies. Legislators we have spoken to are saying the right things: they do not intend to bury the report, nor act too hastily. It is becoming clear that, behind the scenes -- and increasingly in public -- Liberians are involved in a conversation about what to make of the report, and how to move forward -- a discussion we believe is crucial to Liberia's future and to the process of reconciliation.

THOMAS-GREENFIELD